

(U) Ask Zelda!: Boss Is Steering Us Wrong

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

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(U) The following article is unclassified in its entirety.



A question for Zelda: My coworkers and I have run into a sensitive issue. Our office travels frequently, and we usually share rental cars. Our manager, however, is not a good driver, and none of us wants to ride with him driving again. In the past we have been able to arrange people/cars such that he does not need to drive, but for an upcoming trip, he has reserved himself a rental car and denied another traveler's rental car request. How can we communicate our concern without insulting our manager?

-- Petrified Passenger

Dear Petrified Passenger,

Oh, gee. Am I allowed to say "I don't know?" This is a tough one. I can think of all kinds of underhanded solutions for preventing your boss from driving on your trip (like dropping an anvil on his foot or plying him with beers at dinner and then insisting he not drive while intoxicated), but no easy way out. The only advice I can give you is to approach him directly and tactfully.

Select one person to speak to the manager (whom I'll call Dale)--perhaps the one whose rental car request was denied. This traveler should set up a private meeting (to lessen the embarrassment) when Dale is relaxed and not in a rush. I see the discussion going something like this:

Trepid Traveler: I was wondering if you'd consider letting me reserve the rental car and do the driving on our upcoming trip.

Outcome 1

Dale: Sure, that would be fine. I hate driving, anyway. I only turned down your request because I had already put it on my **RTA**, but it should be easy enough to switch.

Outcome 2

Dale: Why? I've got it covered.

TT: Well, please don't take offense, but I get a little nervous riding in the car when you're driving.

Dale: I see. I'm sorry I made you uncomfortable. Sure, we can switch the car to your name for this trip.

Outcome 3

Dale: Why? I've got it covered.

TT: Well, please don't take offense, but I get a little nervous riding in the car when you're driving.

Dale: What's wrong with my driving?

TT: You drive a little faster than I'm comfortable with. // When you take your eyes off the road and turn around to talk to people in the back seat, I get very uncomfortable. // The two fender benders on our last trip while you were driving left me unsettled. [Substitute the misdemeanor of your choice.]

Dale: Hmm. You should have said something. I didn't realize I was making you nervous. I'll be more careful about that in the future. If I do it again, please speak up right away.

Trepid Traveler, you should prepare for all three scenarios... and any others you can think of, knowing your boss. Decide, before going into the meeting, whether a promise to do better is acceptable or if you want to push for Dale not driving at all. Focus on your own reaction ("I'm uncomfortable...") rather than blaming his behavior ("You're a terrible driver"). Be prepared to cite specifics, such as excessive speed and taking eyes off the road.

Be respectful and discreet. If he doesn't want to relinquish the car keys, ask him to suggest a solution to the situation. After all, he is the manager and you should be able to bring your problems to him for guidance. If he challenges you and says you're being too sensitive, you may want to mention that others feel the same way--but I'd suggest using that as a last resort, since he might get more defensive if he feels like his staff is ganging up on him.

Once he agrees to either let someone else drive or drive more carefully when others are in the car, thank him--for his acquiescence and for being approachable on the subject. If it turns out he will be the one driving, don't forget your St. Christopher medal*... just for good measure.

Zelda

* Saint Christopher is the patron saint of travelers.